

**Amendments to the Claims:**

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings of claims in the application:

**Listing of Claims:**

- 1                    1.        (Previously Presented) A stringed instrument comprising:  
2                    a solid body having exposed front and rear surfaces;  
3                    a tuning mechanism;  
4                    a neck having one end joined to said body and an opposite end retaining said  
5                    tuning mechanism;  
6                    a retainer block distinct from and encompassed by said rear surface; and  
7                    a plurality of strings each having a first end secured to said tuning mechanism;  
8                    and a second end retained by said retainer block.
- 1                    2.        (Original) A stringed instrument according to claim 1 including a bridge  
2                    mounted on said front surface and wherein said strings extend from said tuning mechanism, over  
3                    said bridge, and through said body to said block.
- 1                    3.        (Original) A stringed instrument according to claim 2 wherein said  
2                    retainer block has an inner surface and an outer surface and defines a plurality of channels  
3                    extending between said inner and outer surfaces, and each of said strings passes through a  
4                    different one of said channels.
- 1                    4.        (Original) A stringed instrument according to claim 3 wherein said  
2                    second ends are enlarged to prevent passage through said channels.
- 1                    5.        (Original) A stringed instrument according to claim 4 wherein each of  
2                    said channels comprises a counterbore in said outer surface retaining one of said enlarged second  
3                    ends.

1                   6.     (Original) A stringed instrument according to claim 1 wherein said block  
2 is unitary and made of brass.

1                   7.     (Original) A stringed instrument according to claim 6 including a bridge  
2 mounted on said front surface and wherein said strings extend from said tuning mechanism, over  
3 said bridge, and through said body to said block.

1                   8.     (Original) A stringed instrument according to claim 7 wherein said  
2 retainer block has an inner surface and an outer surface and defines a plurality of channels  
3 extending between said inner and outer surfaces, each of said strings passes through a different  
4 one of said channels.

1                   9.     (Original) A stringed instrument according to claim 8 wherein said  
2 second ends are enlarged to prevent passage through said channels.

1                   10.    (Original) A string instrument according to claim 9 wherein each of said  
2 channels comprises a counterbore in said outer surface retaining one of said enlarged second  
3 ends.

1                   11.    (Original) A string instrument according to claim 3 wherein said body  
2 defines a cavity retaining said block and intersecting said rear surface.

1                   12.    (Original) A stringed instrument according to claim 11 wherein said  
2 second ends are enlarged to prevent passage through said channels.

1                   13.    (Original) A stringed instrument according to claim 12 wherein each of  
2 said channels comprises a counterbore in said outer surface retaining one of said enlarged second  
3 ends.

1                   14.    (Original) A stringed instrument according to claim 11 wherein said  
2 block is unitary and made of brass.

1                    15.    (Original) A stringed instrument according to claim 14 wherein said  
2 second ends are enlarged to prevent passage through said channels.

1                    16.    (Original) A stringed instrument according to claim 15 wherein each of  
2 said channels comprises a counterbore in said outer surface retaining one of said enlarged second  
3 ends.

1                    17.    (Previously Presented) A stringed instrument according to claim 1  
2 wherein the solid body defines a slot from the front surface through the body, and wherein the  
3 plurality of strings extend through the slot.